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AMERICAN POLITICS.

NOTHING in this country appears to the stranger more intricate and inexplicable than our politics. The different parties, two big ones and several little ones, the various machines, county, state, and national, the “bosses,” “heelers,” and “workers” present such a confusion of ideas and a terminology so varied, that it is only after many years that the foreigner begins to comprehend our system of government and the principles underlying our political movements. Indeed, the majority of Americans themselves are no better off and have no clear perception of the part they are playing in the administration of affairs or the ethical effects of the ballot which they cast. Ask the ordinary voter why he supports the candidates of a certain party and you will find that his reasons are reducible to a few concrete facts, and are rarely governed by any general principles.

In the Southern states the vast majority of the whites are democrats through opposition to the republican party which fought the war and deprived them of their slaves. The negroes on the other hand are republicans because it is to that party they owe their freedom, and from it they expect protection for themselves in the exercise of their political rights and the blessings of opportunity for education. The political question there becomes a race question, utterly regardless of the principles which the two great parties represent. Let there be a complete change of platforms and the result would be precisely the same as it has been for the past generation—the South would still remain democratic, and the votes of their presidential electors would still be cast for the candidates of that party.

There is a minor race question in the feeling against foreigners, more especially Irish, Italians, and Germans, influenced to some extent by the fact that a large number of these foreigners are Roman Catholics and that there is an uneasy suspicion on the part of some Americans that the Catholic church is hostile to the spirit of democracy, a suspicion not entirely unfounded if one should judge solely by the sayings and doings of some of the prelates of that church for the past forty years. This "Know-nothing" sentiment at one time threatened to create a solid foreign vote in opposition. Germans and Irish united under the protecting wings of Tammany Hall and, aided by clergymen who hoped to obtain part of the state educational fund for their private parochial schools, formed a strong ally to the national democratic party. Happily prejudices of race and religion are dying out and neither party can now claim a monopoly of the foreign vote. Strange as it may seem, however, the Irish and German elements, so recently the objects of proscription themselves, have in late years become embittered against the Chinese. To the patient industry of the Mongolian immigrants is due the building of the Pacific railroads, when it would have been impossible to obtain white labor, and the cultivation and development of the Pacific coast states. Congress was terrorised into passing the law excluding all Chinese laborers. It was more than race prejudice which contributed to this hatred of the Chinese. The chief reason for Chinese exclusion was an economic one. Great masses of laborers feared that the Chinese by immigrating in vast numbers would deprive them of work by taking their places at lower wages, and, having the ballot, they dictated to Congress the terms of the Anti-Chinese Act.

The alien contract labor law is a measure conceived in the same spirit and directed against the hiring of laborers abroad by American contractors, who could thus displace their employés at lower wages by Hungarians, or Poles, or Russians, ignorant of the language of this country and whose compensation could be the more easily reduced to a bare maintenance, and who in sickness or old age could be turned out on the roads to die without costing the contractor any contraction of his bank account. There was some excuse for this

law, or at least for the feeling which prompted it, when the miners of a whole section could be evicted and they and their families made to suffer the pangs of slow starvation because the owners of the coal lands found they could obtain human machines at a less cost from abroad. It was natural that the laborers should demand a law which offered some immediate relief even at the risk of meeting wrong with wrong, rather than that they should attempt to regulate affairs on abstract principles of justice while their stomachs were empty and their wives and children were dying for want of sufficient nourishment. That feeling, however, is also vanishing and American workingmen are beginning to see that the increase in population, native-born as well as that imported by contract, is steadily adding to the number of competitors and lowering the rate of wages. Their attention is becoming more and more directed to the opening of new opportunities for work rather than to the restricting of the number of workers.

Another class of men, if they vote at all, do so on no general principle of public welfare, but solely for their own advantage at the expense of their fellow men. These are to be found among the rich manufacturers, the coal, and iron, and railway kings, and the manipulators of the crops of the nation. Rarely casting a ballot in person, they give notice to their thousands of employés that if the latter do not support the candidates or the party which they happen to favor, the employés' places will be given to more pliant servants. These men are as non-partisan as the most ardent reformer could wish. One of them, a few years ago when questioned by an investigating committee of the New York state legislature, said: "In a republican district I was a strong republican; in a democratic district I was democratic; and in doubtful districts I was doubtful, but in politics I was an Erie railroad man every time." Another famous man of the same type said he had no politics; that he found it cheaper to buy up one set of legislators after they were elected than to purchase two sets of candidates before election. These corrupt men, counting their wealth by tens of millions, influencing state legislatures and the national Congress, and throwing their weight into Presidential campaigns, constitute the chief "dangerous class"

in the United States to-day, far more threatening to the permanency of free institutions than the anarchists who were hanged at Chicago.

Then there are the illy-paid employés of these men who do their bidding at the polls, voting for the candidates of their masters. Promise of office or patronage lures others into the support of one party or the other. Lastly come the poorest of the poor who live in the most miserable tenement houses, or when single live in the big lodging-houses which are found chiefly in New York and Chicago. A ton of coal or a barrel of flour is the bribe to the former, frequently effected through the medium of the poor wretch's wife who does not care for politics but sees a very material advantage in the food or fuel offered by the ward worker. The lodging-house voters, paid by drinks of whiskey or dollar bills, until recently in New York were marshalled in squads of twenty or thirty early on the morning of election day, given their ballots and compelled to hold them aloft between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand so that the heeler or paid servant of some political faction might watch them from the moment they took their place in the line of voters until their ballots were handed to the election inspectors and dropped in the box. Both parties wink at such frauds and their henchmen directly countenance and assist in them but the party that happens to be in the majority in any locality is usually the one most guilty. The result is that the minority affects great virtue and loudly denounces the corruption of its opponents.

Among those who do vote on principle are the prohibitionists, the greenbackers, the adherents of ephemeral labor parties and the socialists. The anarchists generally refrain from voting because they do not believe in any government by force and say that an enlightened public opinion will lead the people to dispense with such things as the army and navy and police and law courts. The socialists occasionally vote for the men of other parties whom they think represent the worst measures, in order the sooner, as they frankly avow, to produce revolutionary conditions, which they expect would assist them greatly in their propaganda. The prohibitionists, greenbackers, and labor men each take a partial view of political economy. The first see the evils and degradation arising from

intemperance and think that everything else must yield to the one consideration of the abolition of the liquor traffic. The panacea of the greenbackers consists in the destruction of the monopoly of the currency now enjoyed by the national banks. The labor men have different shibboleths at different times such as the prevention of child labor in factories, an eight-hour work-day and the like—measures which might effect some relief but are minor matters compared with the great social problem of the increase of poverty in the midst of the greatest productive energies which the world has ever seen, a problem which is rapidly coming to the front and overshadowing all others.

But these minor movements hardly produce a ripple on the surface of our political waters. There are only two parties worthy of the name in the United States to-day, as there have been but two ever since the days of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. These parties go on forming platforms chiefly on the theory of offending the least number of voters and phrasing their declarations in vague terms which may be explained one way in one part of the country and another way in another part. Such is a cursory view of the field of American politics to-day.

It may seem that I have made out a pretty bad indictment of corruption against our politics and that the view of the cynic is correct that American politics are desperately wicked and there is no health in them. But the moral forces which are operating in the world are fortunately not dependent upon the changeable methods or the selfish objects of men. It is here in America, perhaps more than anywhere else, that the natural laws of social development have fullest play. It is here that the evolution of politics is working itself out freely, untrammelled by tradition or custom. It is here that the ultimate ideal of politics will first be reached. When the framers of the Declaration of Independence formulated their proposition that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, a step in the right direction was taken—a step that was in accordance with our old Saxon traditions, yet for the first time in the world's history made on an extended scale, to base human government on the principles of natural law. And through all the vicissi-

tudes of our country, its struggle for independence, its war for the liberation of its commerce, its civil conflict which would have dismembered any other nation, or would have left one section the subjugated serfs of the other, through a disputed presidential election which strained the written constitution to its utmost, the great moral force of natural law has been working, now through one party, now through another, gathering impetus as it goes and giving promise always of better times to come.

It is in this broad view that all the petty thieveries and striving for place and power sink into utter insignificance. The people do still rule. They may sleep for a time but are sure, sooner or later, to assert their rights in accordance with the instincts of the human mind, which are good and not bad. As long as the suffrage shall exist it is reasonably certain that this American government, "of the people, by the people, for the people," shall not perish from the earth. If the wealthy monopolists could control the suffrage, the prospects might be different. The freedom of the voter has been impaired to a certain extent but the American people with quick instincts have awakened to the danger. The Australian system of voting, which secures secrecy and freedom from intimidation and almost extinguishes bribery is now becoming very popular. Fifteen of the states have adopted it and the other twenty-nine will, no doubt, follow their example in a few years. But the introduction of measures for its establishment presented the curious anomaly of being opposed by democrats in some localities and by republicans in others, both for partisan reasons, constitutional and high moral pretexts being of course, advanced. When it becomes the general law, it will do more than anything else to purify electoral methods.

Entirely above the question of methods, however, there are certain principles involved in American politics which it becomes of the highest importance to comprehend and which furnish the key to the apparently inexplicable confusion. These principles, it seems to me, are reducible to two, which may be likened to the centripetal and centrifugal forces in nature. As both are needed for the stability of the physical universe, so both the centralising and decentralising tendencies in politics are necessary for the co-ordination of the state.

It is in the free play of these forces, each in its proper sphere, that lies the assurance of the perpetuity of American institutions. But as the ideal has not yet been reached, the practical result is that one tendency begins to act, at first legitimately, then from the aggrandisement of power and the "cohesive force of public plunder" the administrators of government attempt to stretch it unduly, the opposition comes to power and the same story is repeated. In each case the liberal party succeeds the conservative, acts at first wisely, then corrupted by the subtle temptations of place and power, and wishing to retain both, it becomes opposed to change and begets a new conservatism, while new liberals arise on a higher plane of evolution to continue the never-ending struggle. And it must be recollected that the conservative party of each generation is far more liberal than the one which it displaced, thus giving assurance of perpetual progress.

This has been the epitome of all American history; each party government, by whatever name it may have been known, has been liberal in comparison with its predecessor and conservative as to its successor. When Washington organised his administration it was no doubt regarded in Europe as highly revolutionary and anarchistic. But such a class government, with laws of entail and slavery, and cruel punishments for petty offences, as existed then, would not be tolerated for a single year at the present time. Thomas Jefferson who founded the democratic party, then called the republican, was a consistent opponent of aristocracy and personally was a man far in advance of his time, but most of his followers would be horrified if they should now come back to earth and see the powers possessed by the general government to-day, necessary, legitimate powers, without which the affairs of the nation could not be administered for a single week. The United States soon got rid of laws of entail and the established churches. The democracy came to power and held it nearly sixty years. Long continuance in office endeared its possession to that party while the very growth of the nation, from five millions to thirty-one millions, demanded changes in internal policy which were not forthcoming. There were not lacking signs of popular discontent. In 1840 the democrats met their first defeat, and for

three or four presidential terms the votes vibrated between the democrats and the whigs. But the latter were not united on a consistent policy. They needed a principle. The principle was shaping itself. Slavery, which had been abolished in the Northern states, was gradually strengthening in the South. The democrats forgot, or rather most of them never learned, that true democracy knows no distinction of color. The abolitionists were denounced by press and pulpit as socialists, as the disturbers of public order, as blasphemers against the very law of God contained in Holy Writ. The people, however, returned to power these same socialists and the institution of chattel slavery was doomed. That would have been the case in any event, but the civil war precipitated it, just as many other unjust wars in history have resulted in disestablishing the very institutions to perpetuate which the wars were made.

The republican party grandly and patriotically fulfilled its mission. By degrees, however, the enormous destruction of wealth during the war and the heavy debt entailed by it, created a burdensome system of taxation which substituted self-interest for patriotism. Duties were laid upon imports from abroad heavier than those which formed one of the chief causes for the revolt of the colonies against Great Britain. These duties enabled American manufacturers to make on American soil the same class of goods that were imported and charge the same price as the imported goods enhanced by the duty, of course pocketing for themselves the extra profit which the tariff aided them to obtain from consumers. The quickest way to wealth was to start some manufacture, get the government to put a tax on similar articles imported and pocket the difference, or to get an internal revenue measure passed taxing a certain line of domestic goods, pay the tax in the first instance and then charge it to the consumers with of course a good commission added for patriotic services. As long as the government had work for every man who could shoulder a musket, the pernicious effect of the system was not clearly seen. But when the war was over and one million men returned to productive avocations, wages began to fall. Then the question of taxation inevitably came to the front and has now become the living issue of the hour. The needle of the suffrage is again vibrating, the

republican party has been deprived of power for four years and the democratic President emphasised the issue by pushing the question of tariff reform to the foreground. His re-election was defeated, but the question is debated with more vigor than ever, and all signs point to absolute free trade as one of the certainties of the future. Judging from the last Congressional elections, the people have at last turned their faces in the right direction.

It will be noticed that two elements, which I have called the centripetal and the centrifugal, have been predominant in shaping American politics. They may be termed the socialistic and the anarchistic forces. Socialism claims the direction of everything by a strong centralised government. Anarchists say with the democrats, "That government is best which governs least," and logically argue for the abolition of all government. Now, the right or wrong of these principles depends upon their application. Only the most rabid anarchist would object to the Post Office, for instance, and few socialists would claim that the state has a right to regulate a man's clothing or his religion. It is on the question as to what subjects these principles should be applied that all our American parties arise. The early federalists were socialistic in that they believed in a strong central government and in relegating as few things as possible to the states. President Jefferson introduced the anarchistic or centrifugal principle of decentralisation and individualism. But as the nation grew, it was seen that this wrought injustice, especially in the matter of slavery which was a violation of human rights, however the different states might regard it. Then the socialistic or centripetal principle began to act and slavery disappeared. Now it seems likely that the individualistic principle will again become dominant in an attempt to abolish all fiscal restrictions upon trade. After this may follow the socialistic principle of state ownership of railways and telegraphs. Perhaps this will be the work of the new political forces evidently gathering, as foreshadowed by the Farmers' Alliance, after the breaking-up of parties and after the democrats, having given us free trade, will have resumed their natural position of conservatives. Then, in the remoter future, may come the anarchistic principle of the removal of the restrictions against female suffrage. And so it will go on, first one

principle acting and fulfilling its mission, then the other, each bringing the nation to a higher plane of progress and uniting it more and more closely with the grand upward march of the human race.

What is this, after all? It is not socialism. It is not anarchy. It is neither democracy nor republicanism. It is EVOLUTION. It does not depend on the temporary success of party governments for its action. It does not even solely result from our unique position or our independence wrested from Great Britain. Back of it lie the broad principles of British liberty, of common law, of Magna Charta won from King John on the plains of Runnymede. Back of it is the great wave of democracy arising out of the darkness of the Middle Ages. Back of it are the injunctions of Him of Galilee who taught the natural law as no man ever taught before. Back of it is Roman jurisprudence and Greek art and culture and the early efforts of the days when Cadmus brought the alphabet to Europe with his Phœnician colony. Indeed, back of it lies the primeval impulse of the first man, God-endowed, ape-descended, who stood upon his feet and began to think. We may carry our thoughts still further to the times when the red sunlight first filtered through the thick clouds upon an uninhabited world, and still further may we go in thought into the ages of eternity, and assert with fullest confidence that the principles of progress to-day working themselves out in politics are but the reflection of the divine ideals founded in the laws of nature.

Can the course of such progress be turned back? Can we despair of the future in the light of all the past? Is not the general movement onward and upward? Will not the sneers at ephemeral phases of our American politics pass away with the incidents which they justly condemn, while the principles of progress remain forever?

THOMAS B. PRESTON.